

Secondary Analyses of Data on the National Incidence of Child Maltreatment Project Abstracts

Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago with Georgia State University

- PI: Dr. Leanne Heaton
- *Leveraging Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Administrative Data to Understand the Relevance of Context in Surveillance and Advancing Equity*

Our project examines how state child welfare performance on the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR-3) differ across states and within states, and how the performance is associated with racial disparities in the child welfare system. The project has two objectives: (1) The first objective is to assess the relationship over time between state child welfare agencies' performance on the Child and Family Services Reviews CFSR-3 statewide data indicators (SDWIs) and performance by racial subgroups to examine racial disparities. The second (2) objective is to evaluate the role of community and child welfare context in explaining state performance on the CFSR-3 SDWIs and the degree to which that performance affects disparities. Specifically, we want to test the role of the child welfare administration framework (state vs. county), state TANF expenditures, and other county-level social and economic programs on performance, and then assess how these together contribute to racial/ethnic disparities.

Successful child maltreatment surveillance means children and families receive services equitably based on genuine needs and this reduces the likelihood of future reports and investigations. Evidence shows that the efficacy of child welfare services varies and is dependent on individual, family, and case characteristics, geographical context, and organizational capacity of the state child welfare agency itself. Therefore, we plan to test if improved performance reduces racial and ethnic inequities while also considering the context of service delivery. This will allow us to better understand and isolate the source of disparities to inform targeted solutions.

To meet our project's objectives, we propose to link NCANDS and AFCARS data with other population-level data to provide the socioeconomic context of service delivery. Our proposed services are to implement a four-part analytic strategy: (1) Use graphical methods and descriptive statistics to show the relationship between overall SDWIs and race- specific SWDI disparity ratios; (2) Estimate separately by race-ethnic-group the SWDI measures while accounting for time; (3) Model the race-ethnic-group specific SWDI measures separately using multi-level models that account for individual/case-level characteristics (level one) and county-level socioeconomic contextual characteristics (level two) to determine the impacts of both levels on the race-ethnic specific outcomes; and (4) Use innovative statistical methods to detect if unequal distribution of county-level socioeconomic programs are contributing to racial disparities. The population groups to be served by our project are state child welfare agencies and the children and families they serve.

Chapin Hall Center for Children

- PI: Dr. Amy Dworsky
- *Child Maltreatment among Children in Out-of-Home Care: Secondary Analysis of NCANDS and AFCARS Data*

Children are placed in out-of-home care (OOHC) with the expectation that this will protect them from further harm. Yet, research indicates that child maltreatment occurs in all types of OOHC settings and that all types of child maltreatment (CM) occur in OOHC (Biehal, 2013; Uliando & Mellor, 2012). Despite this evidence, CM in OOHC is an understudied topic and most research on CM in OOHC in the US is more than two decades old.

The proposed study will address key gaps in national CM surveillance by focusing on CM among children in OOHC. It will be the first to use national data to take a comprehensive look at the incidence of CM among children in OOHC (both substantiated and unsubstantiated), the nature of that CM (neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or emotional maltreatment), and the relationship between CM in OOHC and child characteristics. We will involve other CM scholars and young people with lived experience in foster care in the research process.

We will link data from the NCANDS Child Files for reporting years 2011 to 2021 to data from the AFCARS Foster Care Files for reporting years 2011 to 2020. Prior to linking, we will deduplicate the NCANDS data and transform the AFCARS data into episode-level files. We will measure unadjusted and adjusted incidence rates of CM (substantiated and unsubstantiated allegations), substantiated CM, CM of each type (neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or emotional maltreatment), and substantiated CM of each type. Our adjusted rates will account for the number of days children are in OOHC.

We will compute 10-year average incidence rates and test for differences based on child age, gender, race/ethnicity, and placement setting. We will describe the characteristics of children (e.g., age, gender, race, ethnicity, and placement setting) who experienced CM in OOHC and the type(s) of CM they experienced and test the relationship between child characteristics and CM type. In the case of children who experienced an allegation that was substantiated, we will describe the perpetrators of the CM. We will also examine the variation in incidence rates and the characteristics of children in OOHC who experience CM across states.

Finally, we will use multilevel binary logistic regression to examine the relationship between the likelihood of experiencing CM in OOHC and an array of child predictors (i.e., child age, gender, race, ethnicity, alcohol or drug abuse disorder, mental health or behavioral disorder, disability, substance-exposure during infancy, and placement setting) across the 10 years. The multilevel model is necessary to account for the fact that children are nested within states.

The results of the proposed study can inform strategies to strengthen the national surveillance of CM and provide child welfare systems with information they can use to prevent further harm to children who have already been neglected or abused.

Child Trends, Incorporated

- PI: Dr. Rachel Rosenberg
- *Mandated reporting policies and the relationship with accurate surveillance of child abuse and neglect*

In FY 2020, child welfare agencies received an estimated 3.9 million referrals alleging child abuse and neglect (CAN), 2.1 million of which were screened in and met the criteria for an investigation or alternative response (“reports”). More than two-thirds (68%) of those reports were made by professionals (e.g., teachers, police, doctors) who are mandated by state policies to report suspected CAN (“mandated reporters”).

Mandated reporting policies have evolved over time, often in response or reaction to high-profile cases of CAN, such as child fatalities or other egregious acts of abuse that go unreported to child welfare agencies. Changes to mandated reporting policies are made under the presumption that expanding the definition of mandated reporters or adding training requirements or penalties for not reporting result in more people making reports of CAN (i.e., more reports), therefore fewer missed cases of and more accurate reporting of CAN. However, little is known about whether this presumption is correct.

The primary objective of the proposed study is to examine the effectiveness of mandated reporting policies by testing the presumption that broad definitions and other requirements result in more accurate surveillance of CAN, as measured by the rate of reported incidences of CAN, as well as the rate of subsequent substantiations. The second objective is to examine the degree to which other factors influence these rates, such as the race/ethnicity of children involved in reports of CAN, the report source, and the type of CAN reported.

Using the State Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) Policies Database, a new innovative data source that compiles state-level policy information on child maltreatment, and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), we will answer the following research questions:

- **RQ1.** How, if at all, are rates of reported and substantiated CAN associated with different components of states’ mandated reporting laws (i.e., definitions of who is a mandated reporter, training requirements, penalties for failure to report, ability to report anonymously)?
- **RQ2.** Are associations between state mandated reporting laws and rates of reported and substantiated CAN moderated by race/ethnicity of children involved in the report, the report source (e.g., professional vs. community member), and type of maltreatment reported (e.g., neglect vs. physical abuse)?

We expect the results of this study will help policymakers and child welfare administrators determine the extent to which such policies help or hinder a state’s ability to effectively respond to CAN. A better understanding of the effects of mandated reporter policies can help improve the response of child welfare agencies to reports of CAN and more effectively protect children.

Washington University

- PI: Dr. Brett Drake
- *Building Infrastructure and Training Tools to Understand CPS Involvement and Trajectories: An Open-Source Approach*

We will build out the comprehensive infrastructure (data integration, research products, training, and policy relevant recommendations) which is required to support informed and open- source use of the new US Report And Placement Integrated Data System (RAPIDS). RAPIDS is a program (data construction algorithm) which can be used to transform existing NCANDS child maltreatment (CM) report and AFCARS data into a single, user-friendly dataset utilizable by researchers with NDACAN data use agreements. We will also build and test linkages to policy and census data files to enhance policy relevant analyses of CM incidence. The proposed “Open- Source Approach” project responds to specific goals of the Secondary Analyses of Data on the National Incidence of Child Maltreatment (HHS-2022-ACF-OPRE-FA-0149) call to aid collaboration among CM researchers and policy makers. This project is a collaboration among several prominent CM researchers. Project outcomes will significantly expand networking and collaboration among CM researchers by enabling them to analyze and use RAPIDS data enhanced with policy and community data. Analyses and testing of the data will also address several specific and timely CM incidence research questions.

The RAPIDS algorithms and the resulting dataset have been under development by a consortium of researchers at Washington University in St. Louis, University of Illinois Urbana- Champaign and University of Colorado School of Medicine for five years. RAPIDS data construction algorithms combine the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) and the Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS) data from 2005 forward into a *single*, linked longitudinal dataset that combines records at the child/event level for both Child File CM reports (one record per referral per child) and AFCARS foster care (FC) spells (one record per foster care episode [entry-to-exit] per child) while preserving temporal information between events. Having a historical database that accurately captures longitudinal sequences of nationwide records of all CM reports and FC cases over a decade and a half is a critical advance which will accelerate science in CM surveillance in the US. Our tested algorithms also place children in sibling groups based on network analysis. RAPIDS data, in addition to the new linkages to policy and census information, are a significant improvement over the raw NCANDS and AFCARS data. A child’s entire lifetime trajectory (during the 2005- 2019 timeframe) of CM reports and FC spells is available using RAPIDS. These linked data have the potential to support a wide range of relevant research questions.

Our “Open-Source Approach” objectives are: (1) build comprehensive user infrastructure for RAPIDS (e.g. fully documented algorithms, a user’s guide); (2) conduct and disseminate two RAPIDS analyses for research questions of relevance; these analyses include census data linkage and will form the basis for developing training materials; (3) determine and summarize the feasibility of integrating RAPIDS, CDC, the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), and other data sources including policies; (4) create training materials and conduct in-person user training in 2024; and (5) develop broad recommendations to support future research.

RAPIDS capabilities are shown by our team’s initial study published in *Child Maltreatment* in which we found that surprising numbers of children in out-of-home care in child protective services (CPS) systems lack a preceding CM allegation, with large levels of state variability. We have also presented these early results at several conferences in 2021 and 2022.